This issue is dedicated to Christmas around the World. On behalf of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Happy Holiday’s and Happy New Year!

Africa

In Liberia, most homes have an oil palm for a Christmas tree, which is decorated with bells. On Christmas morning, presents such as cloth, soap, and sweets are exchanged. Dinner is eaten outdoors with everyone sitting in a circle to share a meal that can consist of rice, beef and biscuits. Games are played in the afternoon, and at night there is a big fireworks show. In South Africa, homes are decorated with pine branches and have decorated Christmas fir in a corner inside the home with presents around it. A typical Christmas lunch consists of turkey, roast beef, mince pies, suckling pig, yellow rice with raisins, plum pudding, and crackers. The day after Christmas is called The Day of Goodwill, which is considered an extension of Christmas or a day to recover from Christmas indulgences. The idea is to practice goodwill unto others.

Europe

In Europe, how Christmas is celebrated typically depends on the language the people speak. In Belgium, children have two Christmas visitors Pere Noel and St. Niklaas. Much like Santa in the United States, on December 6th Perre Noel visits those of the Walloon and French languages and leaves good children candy and bad children twigs. The Feast of St. Niklaas is on December 6th. It is celebrated in churches and with small family gatherings. Special cakes are baked as treats for children and adults. The Feast of St. Niklaas doesn’t have anything to do with Christmas but at night he visits all of the children to bring them presents.

Asia

Christmas is a Western tradition and is not really celebrated in Asian countries, however, in China the Chinese New Year is considered the most important traditional Chinese holiday. It can fall anywhere between January 21 and February 20. You will typically see red and gold almost everywhere. Gold is believed to bring wealth and red is considered lucky. Much like China, in Japan their new year is also very eventful. It is celebrated over five days and families get together to eat, pray and send special greeting cards. December 25 is not recognized as a national holiday so schools and businesses are still open.
Australia

Christmas is celebrated during the summer in Australia. It is very common for families to go camping together for the holiday. Homes are typically decorated with Christmas bush, a beautiful tree with green leaves and cream colored flowers that turn red. In the city of Sydney, there is the “Carols by Candlelight” where famous performers sing holiday favorites. In the city of Bondi Beach, there is an enormous beach party called the Sunburnt Christmas Festival on Christmas Day where there are DJ's, bikini contests, and an Aussie BBQ.

South America

In Bolivia, Christmas is a harvest festival. The people give thanks for the hard work they completed for the year. Typically the people feast and ask the Goddess Mother Earth for a future fruitful harvest and to keep away plagues. In Brazil, Santa Claus is known as Papa Noel. There are no Christmas trees but many people have Crèche or Presepio that represent Christ Child’s birth. In Ecuador, the children write letters to Christ Child and put a pair of shoes in their window before they go to sleep on Christmas Eve. The hope is that Christ-child will place toys in their shoes.

Central America

In Costa Rica, much like Ecuador, Santa Claus does not bring gifts to the children, Baby Jesus does on Noche Buena. Families decorate Cypress trees and pray together every night leading up to Christmas. On Christmas Eve, families feast together with their staple dish of tamales then attend midnight mass together. In Guatemala, for nine days leading up to Christmas there are posadas (processions) where the people act out Joseph and Mary’s search for shelter before Jesus’ birth. A large nativity scene is formed and on the last night Christ Child is added. On Christmas families also feast together where they also enjoy tamales.

North America

In Eastern Canada, they are known for their fir and pine Christmas trees. Every year, the largest fir tree is sent to Boston, Massachusetts because of the assistance given during the Halifax Explosion. Typically, on Christmas, many Canadians have cookie baking parties and eat sweets called barley candy and chicken bones. Barley candy is usually on a stick and is shaped like Santa Claus, reindeer, snowmen, trees and other symbols of Christmas. Chicken bones are a pink candy that tastes like cinnamon. You melt them in your mouth and once melted, they reveal a creamy milk chocolate center. In the United States, Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Families decorate their homes and tree with lights, wreaths, candles, holly, and ornaments. On Christmas Eve many people will attend Church and at night children leave out cookies and milk for Santa Claus to eat while he is delivering their presents throughout the night.
Happy New Years!

Below are other significant events throughout the year.

**Hanukkah**

Hanukkah is celebrated by members of the Jewish faith. Hanukkah is from November 27 - December 5, 2013 (Jewish year 5773). The holiday honors the Maccabees victory over King Antiochus, who forbid Jews to practice their religion. For eight nights, Hanukkah is celebrated with prayer, the lighting of the menorah, and food. A menorah has nine candles, a candle for every night, plus a helper candle. Children play games, sing songs, and exchange gifts. Potato pancakes, known as *latkes* in Yiddish, are traditionally associated with Hanukkah.

**Kwanzaa**

Kwanzaa is a holiday celebrated to commemorate African heritage. It is one week long and begins on December 26th. Family and friends come together to exchange gifts and to light red, green and black candles that each symbolize seven values of African American family life which are *Umoja* (unity), *Kujichagulia* (self-determination), *Ujima* (collective work and responsibility), *Ujamaa* (cooperative economics), *Nia* (purpose), *Kuumba* (creativity) and *Imani* (faith).

**Ramadan**

Ramadan is an important time of year celebrated by Muslims. Ramadan does not always occur during the same time of year because its date is determined by the Islamic calendar. During the thirty days of Ramadan, Muslims do not consume any food or drink from sunrise to sunset. The day is typically filled with a lot of *salat* (prayers) and reciting of the Quran.

All information was found at [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com) and [www.santas.net](http://www.santas.net).